A delegation of six Members of Parliament, led by Hon'ble Member of Parliament, Shri P. Upendra met Taiwanese authorities and raised the issue of detention of these two seamen during their recent visit to Taiwan. They are assured of positive help.

Linking of Indian Missions with Wireless System

2700. SHRI BHAGABAN MAJHI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to link all the Indian Missions with modern wireless system?

(b) if so, how many Missions are likely to be connected with modern wireless system during 1999-2000; and

(c) by which year every Indian Mission abroad would be provided with such facility?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) No Sir. However, the Ministry has implemented to project called High Frequency Radio Communication (HFRC) network with 22 Indian Missions abroad. This is intended for emergency communication purposes when the normal channels of communications are disrupted. It is not proposed to cover any additional Missions with this wireless system.

In addition, all Indian Missions and Posts are linked with headquarters and to each other by telephone, fax and telex and in most cases also by electronic mail.

(c) Does not arise.

Issues discussed in the SAARC conference

2701. SHRI SATISH CHANDRA SITARAM PRADHAN:
SHRI BHAGABAN MAJHI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether various issues were discussed in the last SAARC Conference;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Indo-Pak agreement has been made on preparing of a time-bound road map; and

(d) what other issues concerning Indo-Pak bilateral relation were discussed in the last SAARC Conference?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) The 21st Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers was held in Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka from 18 to 19 March, 1999. This was preceded by the meeting of the SAARC Standing Committee at the official level from 15 to 17 March, 1999. The Council reviewed the progress made in implementing the decisions of the Tenth SAARC Summit held in Colombo in July 1998 with a special focus on regional economic cooperation.

The Ministers approved a modification in the SAPTA Rules of Origin which would reduce the minimum Domestic Content requirement by 10%. They noted with appreciation that the Third Round of SAPTA had been concluded and that the Fourth Round of SAPTA negotiations was to commence in July 1999. They also noted that the Group of Experts had been set up to commence negotiations on a SAFTA Treaty and emphasised the importance of having the Treaty in place by the year 2001.

The Council agreed that the SAARC countries should work closely with a view to identifying issues of common concern and seeking a convergence in strategies well in advance of the forthcoming Third WTO Conference.

The Council also discussed the proposal for a SAARC Social Charter and agreed to constitute an Inter-Governmental Group to proceed with work on the Charter.

The Council approved an expansion of the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme to several new categories to facilitate contacts amongst the business community and cultural and educational institutions.

The Council also discussed the Report of the Group of Eminent Persons and directed the SAARC Secretary General to prepare a draft statement on the "Future Vision of SAARC" for consideration by the Council of Ministers and the SAARC Summit.

The External Affairs Minister had a bilateral meeting with the Foreign Minister of Pakistan on 19 March, 1999 on the sidelines of the Meeting of the SAARC Council of Ministers. The Joint Statement incorporating the decisions taken in the meeting is enclosed. (*See* below)

(d) No issues concerning bilateral relations between India and Pakistan were discussed in the SAARC Meeting. A positive reference was made by the Standing Committee to the reaffirmation of the SAARC goals and objectives in the Lahore Declaration."

Joint Statement

The Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Sartaj Aziz and the Minister of External Affairs of India, Shri Jaswant Singh met today on the sidelines of the 21st Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers at Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka.

They reiterated the historic significance of the Lahore Declaration which embodies the vision of the Prime Ministers of the two countries for ending the legacy of tensions and conflicts of the past fifty years and for ushering a new era of peace, security and prosperity. They discussed ways and means to build on the Lahore Declaration which commits the two countries to build trust and confidence, develop mutually beneficial cooperation and intensify their efforts to resolve all outstanding issues including Jammu and Kashmir.

The two Foreign Ministers agreed on the urgency of taking concrete measures for implementation of the Lahore Declaration, the Memorandum of Understanding and the Joint Statement issued during the Lahore Summit. In this context the Ministers agreed that the composite and integrated dialogue process must be intensified.

The Ministers agreed to the following:

(i) The meetings of Experts for implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding will be held over the next two months.

(ii) The next round of the composite and integrated dialogue process in accordance with the agreed agenda will commence in May 1999 in New Delhi and Islamabad and will be held over a period of six weeks.

(iii) They will meet shortly after the conclusion of the May-June Round of the composite and integrated dailogue process.

(iv) The Committee on humanitarian issues composed of Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan and the Minister of State of External Affairs of India set up by the Prime Ministers at the Lahore Summit will meet in April 1999 to formalise the agreement on the issue of release of civilian prisoners as well as to discuss other humanitarian issues.

(v) That both sides have agreed to relax the visa regime for several categories of visitors. The specific visa relaxation measures shall be announced by the two Governments shortly.

(vi) Delegations of experts from India shall visit Pakistan during April 1999 for identifying areas of cooperation in information technology, Y2K and WTO-related issues.

Squandering of public money by Indian missions

2702. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) how much public money has been squandered by our missions abroad in the matter of unauthorised retention of staff, replacement and renewal of furniture,